

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 0168

LIMDIS

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, JO

SUBJ: WEST BANK CONCERN OVER STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

REF: TEL AVIV 0853

1. SUMMARY: WEST BANK AND JERUSALEM PALESTINIANS SEE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS AS GIVING ISRAELIS OPPORTUNITY TO AVOID DEALING WITH PALESTINIAN QUESTION AND TIME TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR POSITION FURTHER ON WEST BANK. BELIEVING ISRAEL HAS NO INTENTION OF WITHDRAWING FROM WEST BANK NO MATTER WHO NEGOTIATES FOR PALESTINIANS, THEY ARE NOT THINKING OF GOING BACK TO HUSSEIN BUT OF GOING TO GENEVA. THEY SEE US AS ONLY AGENCY THAT CAN BRING ABOUT WITHDRAWAL AND FEAR OUR
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PRESENT APPROACH SHOWS NO DETERMINATION TO FACE THIS ISSUE.

SUPPORT FOR PLO AS REPRESENTATIVE IS STILL GENERAL, THOUGH SOME WHO CLIMBED ON PLO BANDWAGON AFTER 1974 SPECTACULARS MAY BE DRIFTING BACK TOWARD OTHER POLES. END SUMMARY

2. WE HAVE TALKED IN PAST FEW DAYS TO SCORE OR SO OF LEADING WEST BANK AND JERUSALEM PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING ANWAR NUSEIBEH, ANWAR KHATIB AND HAMDI CANAAN (FORMER MAYOR OF NABLUS). WE FOUND UNIVERSAL CONCERN THAT SLOW-PACED STEP BY STEP SETTLEMENT PROCESS WAS GIVING ISRAELIS OPPORTUNITY (SOME SAID WERE DESIGNED TO DO SO) TO AVOID FACING UP TO WEST BANK PROBLEM AND TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR HOLD ON THE AREA MEANWHILE. IN LATTER RESPECT, THEY REFERRED TO ISRAELI PLANS FOR NEW ESTABLISHMENTS OR EXPANSION OF EXISTING ONES AT MAALE ADUMIN, NORTH JERUSALEM AND KIRYAT ARBA.

3. ISRAELIS HAD OF COURSE HOPED TO CREATE SENSE OF PESSIMISM ON WEST BANK IN BELIEF PALESTINIANS WOULD SEE THE ERROR OF RABAT AND SWING BACK TO HUSSEIN. IN FACT, HOWEVER, WEST BANKERS GENERALLY DO NOT ATTRIBUTE LACK OF MOVEMENT TO CHOICE OF PLO AS PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE BUT TO BASIC ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCEANCE (WELL DESCRIBED IN TEL AVIV REFTTEL) REGARDING WEST BANK AND GAZA. THEY HAVE LONG BELIEVED ISRAELIS HAD NO INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM THESE AREAS. HUSSEIN LOYALISTS (SHOULD WE SAY FORMER LOYALISTS?) LOSE NO OPPORTUNITY TO POINT OUT THAT ISRAELIS NEVER OFFERED HUSSEIN A HALF-WAY REASONABLE DEAL WHEN THEY DID HAVE HIM AS PRESUMPTIVE NEGOTIATING PARTNER.

4. THERE MAY NEVERTHELESS BE SOME LESSENING ENTHUSIASM FOR PLO AND SOME INCREASED TALK OF ALTERNATIVES SUCH AS UN-SPONSORED PLEBISCITE TO DETERMINE NATURE OF FUTURE ENTITY AND WHO RULES IT. THIS SEEMS MAINLY TO INVOLVE THE FLOATING ELEMENTS AMONG BUSINESSMEN AND PROFESSIONALS WHO SWUNG TO PLO WHEN IT WAS RIDING HIGH (THROUGH BANDWAGON EFFECT OR OUT OF FEAR OF NOT DOING SO). AFTER PERIOD WITHOUT PLO SPECTACULARS, WHEN IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW PLO CAN TRANSLATE ITS NEW-FOUND STATUS INTO PRACTICAL RESULTS, THESE PEOPLE HAVE TENDENCY TO DRIFT BACK TOWARD OTHER POLES. NONE OF THEM, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT ISRAELIS CAN BE INDUCED TO COUGH UP WEST BANK SIMPLY BY FINDING MORE ACCEPTABLE REPRESENTATIVE TO NEGOTIATE WITH THEM. WE WOULD JUDGE THAT BULK OF WEST BANKERS, MEANWHILE, CONTINUE TO SUPPORT PLO AND
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SEPARATE STATE CONCEPT.

5. HAMDI CANAAN TOLD US SHIMON PERES HAD SOUNDED OUT HIM AND LEADERS OF MASRI CLAN SEVERAL WEEKS AGO ABOUT ESTABLISHMENT OF ARAB WEST BANK ADMINISTRATION UNDER ISRAELI OCCUPATION. AS IN OTHER CASES WE HAVE HEARD OF, HE SAID PERES GOT COMPLETELY NEGATIVE ANSWERS. CANAAN ASSERTS CONCEPT WOULD HAVE BEEN EQUALLY UNACCEPTABLE AT ANY TIME SINCE 1967. INTERESTINGLY,

HE SAID IN PASSING THAT IDEA WOULD HAVE APPEAL ONLY IF ISRAELI ARMY WITHDREW AND "FREE GOVERNMENT" WERE ESTABLISHED. WHEN WE ASKED WHETHER HE MEANT A WEST BANK GOVERNMENT AS DISTINCT FROM "ALL PALESTINIAN" REGIME-- PRESUMABLY PLO -- HE BACKED AWAY SAYING THIS WAS NO UP TO PLO TO DEAL WITH.

6. COMMENT: REALIZING ISRAELI IS NOT PREPARED TO WITHDRAW FROM ALL OR ALMOST ALL OF WEST BANK NO MATTER WHO PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE MAY BE, WEST BANKERS CONTINUE TO LOOK TO US AS ONLY AGENCY THAT CAN BRING ABOUT END OF OCCUPATION. THEY ARE DISAPPOINTED IN AND SUSPICIOUS OF STEP BY STEP PROCESS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT SEE THAT IT REFLECTS US DETERMINATION TO DO THIS. INSTEAD OF THINKING ABOUT A NEW PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE, THEY ARE THINKING OF GENEVA AS A CONTEXT IN WHICH THEIR PROBLEM WOULD BE ON THE TABLE AND IN WHICH US WOULD BE FORCED TO COME TO GRIPS WITH IT. IF THEY COULD CLEARLY SEE OUR CURRENT APPROACH AS LEADING IN SAME DIRECTION, THEIR OPPOSITION TO IT WOULD TEND TO EVAPORATE. IN MEANTIME, WE HAVE IMPRESSION THAT BITTERNESS TOWARD ISRAELIS IS MORE INTENSE THAN EVER, AS ISRAELI INTRASIGANCE SEEMS MORE AND MORE EVIDENT AND, MOST EMBITTERING, MORE AND MORE SUCCESSFUL.

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